



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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CEDAW/C/8R.382
13 November 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 382nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 4 February 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHAN

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IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 21 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 21 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

1. Mrs. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that she was pleased to meet with the Committee at a time when several major developments were taking place in the human rights field. The focus would be on the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, the integration of human rights into the mainstream of the United Nations and the full participation of women as both agents and beneficiaries of development, in accordance with the priorities set down in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It was the practical realization of those objectives in coming years that would be the greatest challenge.

2. In his programme for reform, the Secretary-General had underlined that human rights were fundamental and integral to the promotion of peace and security, economic prosperity and social equity and were linked to the substantive programmes in those areas. He had created the structure for participation by the executive heads of all United Nations agencies in the mainstreaming of human rights as a core value, and that point would be brought out as the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was commemorated in the course of the year.

3. The human rights of women would be highlighted in the commemorative activities, as illustrated by the issuing of a basic information kit, "Women's rights: the responsibility of all", with contributions by both United Nations programmes and intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions and an outline of the activities scheduled for 1998. The study planned by the Committee on the status of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as its contribution to the commemorations, would bring out one of the problem areas.

4. 1998 would also see the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; a review that would, among other things, provide a good opportunity to make a thorough assessment of progress achieved so far with the regard to the human rights of women. The Committee's views and observations in that respect would be extremely valuable and would be studied attentively. As the Committee knew better than anyone, women still faced serious inequalities, both in law and in practice, and in virtually all societies and spheres of activity. Women constituted the overwhelming majority of those living in poverty and the majority of the world's illiterate. They worked more hours than men, their work remained mostly undervalued, and their participation in economic and political decision-making remained very limited.

5. It was her firm intention to make the struggle against such widespread gender discrimination a priority as High Commissioner, in partnership with all those acting in that area. Her Office would be undertaking to strengthen the human rights of women and integrate them into the broader framework of human rights; specifically, by campaigning for the universal ratification of the Convention and the removal of substantive reservations, increasing women's awareness of their human rights, advocating human development programmes that

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promoted gender equality and non-discrimination and trying to strengthen the partnership between women's groups and human rights and non-governmental organizations. Progress in those areas would help to solve some of the economic and social problems that she had outlined.

6. Among the recent developments of interest to the Committee, the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies had, at their eighth meeting, given special attention to reform measures that would improve the effectiveness, efficiency and coordination of their work, particularly with respect to reporting and monitoring. They had urged the Committee to meet occasionally in Geneva to enhance its relationship with the other bodies, and she herself would welcome such a decision by the Committee. The rapid development of the human rights website had, of course, already led to a much better flow of information and documentation between all the treaty bodies, and the new link to the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women would increase coordination. The agreement that representatives of the Division would henceforth attend meetings of the pre-sessional working group of the Human Rights Committee in order to keep it informed about the activities of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would also further harmonization.

7. The chairpersons had, moreover, asked the Division to prepare a background paper analysing what the various treaty bodies had done and could still do to integrate a gender perspective into their work, and had proposed holding another seminar on gender perspectives, similar to the 1995 meeting, to discuss the incorporation of the gender dimension into any revision of general comments, recommendations and guidelines previously issued by the treaty bodies. Furthermore, at the request of the Division, she would be assigning a substantive member of her Office to assist the working group of the Commission on the Status of Women in the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and she intended to give high priority to the protocol.

8. The 1998 report by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women had focused on State-perpetrated or -condoned violence, including custodial violence and violence against refugee and internally displaced women; and the Special Rapporteur had carried out a mission to Rwanda in 1997 to study the post-conflict situation of women, including those in prisons. The Commission's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the territories of the former Yugoslavia had given special attention in her report to the use of rape as a weapon of war, and the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on the situation of systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during periods of armed conflict would be submitting her final report at its next session. In addition, a recent report by the Commission's Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography contained a useful analysis of the impact of the media and of education on commercializing the sexual exploitation of the girl-child in particular. She herself, particularly after a visit to Cambodia in which she had seen first-hand the amount of money channelled into such exploitation and the terrible suffering of the girls involved, would give priority to the issues of violence and exploitation of children, for the most vulnerable were increasingly falling victim to such pressures.

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9. As to the operations of her own Office, a specific project to integrate gender into all technical cooperation projects was now being implemented in the context of the review of technical cooperation in the human rights area. A detailed assessment had been made of some of the technical cooperation practices with respect to gender; the gender expertise of other United Nations technical cooperation agencies had been collected and collated; and the data had been reviewed, and draft procedures and guidelines developed and field-tested. Her Office had established a special team on gender and the human rights of women, in order to develop a more structured approach and ensure systematic gender mainstreaming in all its activities. The team had already had a good influence throughout her Office.
10. She reiterated her strong personal commitment to the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and pledged her fullest support for the Committee's important work, which was particularly significant in the implementation at the country level of the principles it sought to safeguard. The Committee was one of the basic mechanisms for setting benchmarks for economic and social rights and confronting human rights challenges. She hoped in coming years to work very closely with it.
11. Ms. CORTI said that the Committee regarded equality for women not as a utopia but as a challenge, and the High Commissioner would have its cooperation as she dealt with that challenge. She asked her to use every opportunity to give visibility to the Committee and to include it in the strengthened partnership between Headquarters and Geneva. She hoped the High Commissioner would follow the Committee's work on the amendment of the Convention, and consider convening all the human rights treaty bodies to study the problem of overdue reports and to eliminate overlapping activities.
12. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA del REAL said that, as a long-standing member of the Committee, she was optimistic about its progress: the number of ratifications had gone up, its methods of work had improved, the reports it was receiving were better and more detailed, and its relations with non-governmental organizations were livelier. The Committee was open to discussions on ways to improve relations among the treaty bodies and introduce gender perspectives into their work. The new technologies would certainly facilitate such coordination.
13. Ms. SCHÖFF-SCHILLING said that, with the High Commissioner at the helm, new horizons would be opened, and cooperation between the Committee and the other treaty bodies would be encouraged. The issue of reservations by parties to the Convention was an important one, for a number of countries were in effect not complying at all because of their reservations to central provisions such as article 2 or article 16, and were failing to submit reports.
14. Ms. AGULY observed that the Committee was in the best position to appreciate the growing discrimination, violence, exploitation, economic segregation and poverty that were the lot of women throughout the world. A particularly repellent development had been the recent rise of fundamentalist religious movements that denied the elementary rights of women to life and to the education that would emancipate them. In the name of all suffering women, she asked the United Nations and the High Commissioner to work more forcefully

to help them. The visit of the High Commissioner was a sign of her commitment to the Committee's work.

15. The CHAIRPERSON expressed appreciation for the various initiatives announced by the High Commissioner and said that the Committee had begun work on its contribution to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration and on achieving greater efficiency and coordination in its work.

16. Ms. KING (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women) pledged the full support of the Division for the Advancement of Women and stood ready, as Special Adviser, to help achieve gender balance not only in the High Commissioner's Office but in the many human rights monitoring missions around the world that the Office was called upon to field.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.



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Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 383rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 6 February 1998, 5 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHAN

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CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

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The meeting was called to order at 5 p.m.

WAYS AND MEANS OF EXPEDITING THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE (continued)
(CEDAW/C/1998/I/WG.I/WP.1)

1. Ms. CONNORS (Women's Rights Unit) drew the Committee's attention to a number of changes in the report of Working Group I on ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee as contained in document CEDAW/C/1998/WG.I/WP.1. In paragraph 18, South Africa should be added to the list of initial reports; Belarus should be removed from the list of third periodic reports; Belarus and Spain should be added to the list of fourth periodic reports as back-up if other State party delegations were unable to attend.
2. In paragraph 19, Algeria should be added to the list of initial reports; Belarus and Spain should be added to the list of fourth periodic reports if other State party delegations were unable to attend. In paragraph 20, the second clause should read "the Committee will consider the third periodic report of Belarus/Spain". In paragraph 21, Sweden should be added to the list of fourth periodic reports, and Denmark would become the back-up report.
3. Ms. AOUIJ introduced the report of Working Group I on ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee (CEDAW/C/1998/I/WG.I/WP.1). It would be very useful to write to specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system identifying members of the Committee who served as the focal point for the particular agency or organization and requesting that each should nominate an individual to serve as the focal point for the Committee. A focal point should also be nominated to liaise with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations should be invited to attend the presentation of State party reports and should be encouraged to submit shadow reports. Further steps should be taken to establish cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women.
4. The Chairperson would be entrusted with the task of expressing courtesies to the representatives of reporting States on behalf of all Committee members. In order to save time, members of the Committee should refrain from doing so. In addition, Committee members should endeavour not to replicate questions. The Human Rights Committee's "Guidelines for the exercise of functions by members of the Committee" should be circulated among members for consideration and comment. Members of the Committee should refrain from participating in the consideration of reports of States of which they were nationals.
5. The recommendations on contemporary forms of slavery issued by the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities should be integrated into the work of the Committee. It should continue to focus on the extent to which adolescent girls enjoyed their human rights, including their rights to reproductive and sexual health. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should be invited by the Chairperson to present to the Committee an analysis of the impact of their policies on women's enjoyment of rights. Finally, the Chairperson should attend, inter alia, the

special meeting of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies in February 1998. With regard to the regional composition of the pre-sessional working group, negotiations were still under way regarding the African members.

6. Ms. CONNORS (Women's Rights Unit) said that a list of the country rapporteurs for each of the upcoming State party reports had been circulated. The same document listed the members responsible for preparing questions in the pre-sessional working group and the members acting as focal points for specialized agencies.

7. Ms. ABAKA said that all her attempts to establish contact with the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities had come to nothing.

8. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that she had experienced the same problem with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

9. The CHAIRPERSON said that she would send a letter to those organizations reminding them of the name of the Committee's focal point.

10. Ms. AOUIJ said that those organizations should themselves be pressed to provide the name of a contact. In addition, it was necessary to appoint focal points for UNHCR, the World Bank and IMF.

11. Ms. SHALEV asked whether all previous reports would be provided to country rapporteurs and their alternates for ease of comparison with reports under consideration.

12. Ms. CONNORS (Women's Rights Unit) said that Committee members would be provided with whatever material they needed.

13. Ms. CORTI said that the practice of assigning three Committee members to prepare questions on each report by a State party had not worked well in the past. Absolute commitment was required from all members of the team to avoid unfair distribution of the workload.

14. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that she had never been asked for feedback on her contacts with other agencies and organizations. She proposed that the words "and for consideration and adoption at the nineteenth session" should be added at the end of paragraph 9 of the report of Working Group I.

15. Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL said that she too had never been asked to report on her findings. She intended to summarize what she had learned in a paper, which she would subsequently circulate to other members of the Committee. In anticipation of possible enquiries, the Secretariat should clarify why the latest periodic report of Spain was being held in reserve. With reference to Ms. Corti's misgivings about the three-person country teams, her experience had been that the specialist knowledge which each team member brought to the group had been beneficial.

16. Ms. SINEGIORGIS said that she supported the amendment proposed by Ms. Schöpp-Schilling to paragraph 9 but felt that the words "and adoption"

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should be deleted since the Committee could not bind itself to adopt something in the future.

17. Ms. ABAKA suggested that the proposal to amend the rules of procedure should be placed on the agenda of Working Group I for the summer session.

18. Ms. AOUIJ said, with regard to paragraph 6 of the draft report, that the decision to assign three members to prepare questions on each country report had been taken several sessions earlier in an attempt to ensure an equitable and balanced approach. It could, of course, be amended if members so desired. With regard to paragraph 7, a sentence about the requirement for members to submit questions on country reports to the pre-session working group could be added in order to make it part of Committee practice. She agreed with the amendment to paragraph 9 as proposed by Ms. Sinegiorgis. Finally, it would be acceptable for the focal points for the various other human rights bodies to make written reports.

19. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING requested the Secretariat to draw up a list of the decisions that the Committee had taken regarding procedures, which could be reviewed by Working Group I at the summer session. In preparation for the transition to a post-session working group in January 1999, it could attempt to streamline those procedures.

20. The report of Working Group I (CEDAW/C/1998/I/WG.I/WP.1), as amended, was adopted.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS EIGHTEENTH SESSION
(CEDAW/C/1998/L.1 and Add.1-9)

21. The draft report of the Committee on its eighteenth session, as contained in document CEDAW/C/1998/L.1 and Add.1-9, was adopted.

22. Ms. TIMOTHY (Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the Secretariat would consult members regarding the items to be taken up by the Working Groups at the nineteenth session.

Draft decision concerning the statement by the High Commissioner for Human Rights

23. Ms. SINEGIORGIS read out the text of a draft decision concerning the statement to the Committee by Mrs. Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

24. The draft decision was adopted.

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE NINETEENTH SESSION

25. The provisional agenda for the nineteenth session was adopted.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

26. Ms. KING (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that there had been many indications during that productive session of the growing importance of the Committee in the field of human rights. The meeting between the pre-session working group and the specialized agencies, for instance, had been very fruitful and should be repeated in the future. The interest and involvement of non-governmental organizations were also growing, and their contributions had been very helpful to the reporting process.

27. Cooperation with specialized agencies was increasingly important, as witnessed by the support of UNFPA in preparing the draft general recommendation on article 12, especially in the area of reproductive and health rights, and the closer collaboration with UNICEF on the rights of the girl child. The visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had demonstrated the importance that she attached to the Committee, and note had been taken of her suggestions for strengthening links with the Centre for Human Rights.

28. A great deal of progress had been made on the general recommendation on article 12, and the process of its final adoption should be smooth. The statement on reservations to the Convention would also be a very important contribution to the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and she hoped that it could be adopted at the nineteenth session.

29. Finally, in the complex reports considered during the session, including those of four countries in transition, she had been struck by the common problems referred to, despite the diversity of the situations concerned, and by the persistence of patriarchal cultural values. She pledged her full support and that of the Division to the Committee in continuing its important work.

30. After an exchange of courtesies, in which Ms. AOUIJ, Ms. CORTI and Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL participated, the CHAIRPERSON declared the eighteenth session of the Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.